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Pattern practice, as a functional part of the audiolingual and grammar translation methods of language instruction, is described. Characteristics and limitations of repetition, substitution, transformation, and translation drills are outlined. (AF)

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*Audio-lingual Teaching and the Pattern Drill**

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CONSIDERABLE rethinking of foreign-language teaching methodology in the past ten years has provided the interested teacher with a formidable, if not always enlightening literature. The dissemination of these studies and teaching materials has changed the classroom ways of many of us. Thousands of teachers have abandoned the traditional grammar-translation method of language instruction in favor of the New Key or audio-lingual methodology.

But there are several discernible patterns of pedagogical procedure. Some teachers jumped aboard the band wagon and remained there through thick and thin. Others became either quickly or slowly disillusioned with the new vogue and for various reasons have backed off—either by degrees or entirely. The die-hards, of course, were never seriously tempted by these language teaching innovations and have continued happily in their more seasoned habits of the traditional school. Now that the passions

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of that initial confrontation have run their polemic course, teachers at seemingly opposite poles are less openly at odds. And for better or worse, friction has lessened noticeably between this segment and those of our profession who have chosen a more eclectic approach to their task.

This is not to suggest, however, that dialog focused on teaching methods has become old hat; on the contrary, most serious language teachers have resisted the understandable inclination to gravitate complacently toward one method or the other. Teachers and researchers continue to question and experiment in an effort to settle the matter once and for all. And some of these probings have taken new and interesting directions.

A scrutiny of current teaching materials and statements made by teachers as to exactly what is going on in their classrooms reveals that at present there co-exist two principal foreign-language learning theories: habit formation and rule generalization or "cognitive code-learning."[1] The former is descriptive of audio-lingual methods, the latter of an application of grammar-translation. When one observes what actually transpires in the classroom, however, he discovers that no teacher consistently and without contradiction applies either of these theories to his particular methodology. Indeed, most teachers have no clear idea how to best implement either theory. But this judgment does not discredit the teacher in the least, for he is not alone in this dilemma. Those who *should* have the answers—namely, the verbal-learning psychologists and the linguists—for the most part admit that they do not. In fact, they are the first to caution the teacher that they cannot provide any instant solutions. This is necessarily so, since both disciplines are in the initial stages of attaining some insight into the nature of language acquisition.

In order to be able to place pattern practice or pattern drills in a meaningful perspective, we should consider first the tenets of these two theories and in particular the one which relies heavily on such drills. The audio-lingual habit theory implies the acquisition of oral language skills through practice based on repetition and on analogy function.[2] The purpose of overt practice via pattern and other drills is to make speech production automatic, given the necessary stimulus-response relationships. Also implicit in this theory is the understanding that even though the pattern drill is not itself speech in the sense of true communication, the learner will subsequently be able to transfer what he has, in a way, falsely practiced and "learned" to an actual situation demanding real language communication. Researchers have been quick to point out that this assumption is supported by little empirical evidence. Given the false nature of the classroom as a language learning situation, the teacher himself is unable to posit proof of this transfer ability, but since no convincing studies have appeared to uphold or repudiate this habit theory, the pattern-drill enthusiast has stuck to his guns.

The second and more recent theory, now often referred to as the conscious rule generalization theory ("rule governed" is Chomsky's term), is in many ways a reaffirmation or modification of the grammar-translation tradition. This characterization is accurate in the sense that it views foreign-language learning as a conscious process of internalizing the necessary information about structures of the second language through a pointed analysis of the patterns. The theory implies that the student at least acquires the ability to recite the rules governing the structure of the target language, which obviously precludes learning that imitates first-language acquisition. Furthermore, it suggests that since conscious processes facilitate learning, a profusion of pattern drills at best focuses on certain surface features, but

[1] For a further discussion of this term, see John B. Carroll, "The Contributions of Psychological Theory and Educational Research to the Teaching of Foreign Languages," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. XLIX, No. 5 (May, 1965), p. 278.

[2] Noam Chomsky, in his "Linguistic Theory," in *Language Teaching: Broader Contexts*, ed. Robert G. Mead, Jr. Reports of the Working Committees of the Northeast Conference, 1966, pp. 43–44, proposes that our currently accepted principles for formulating this or that theory of knowledge acquisition are open to serious question. He rejects the assumption that language is acquired by means of habit reinforcement, since language is not a "habit structure." Such a theory, says Chomsky, does not account for the obvious creative aspect of language use. He also disavows the function of analogy as operative in language acquisition.

does not permit the student to exploit his inherent linguistic abilities. That is, the student is not allowed to take a short cut by consciously concentrating on the language's structure and on all the members of the classes of those structures. Contrastive analysis, according to this theory, perhaps misleads as much as it aids the teacher, if indeed materials predicated on negative transfer from the native tongue keep the student from going to the heart of the matter.

Much has been said recently about the role of contrastive analysis as a basis for drill formulation, but such an approach appears to hold only limited promise. We do not yet possess thorough analyses of the paired languages. And even when we come to possess such knowledge, we may well discover that we are attacking only the surface features of the language, which presumably would not necessarily be taught on a par with the structures comprising the deeper levels of the grammar. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that more and better drills focusing on certain areas of linguistic friction between two languages would at least help overcome the trivial instances of surface interference. And there is no reason why meaningful hierarchies, based on frequency and difficulty, cannot be established and followed in setting up some drills, especially for recurring troublesome structures, which can and should in turn be handled in a variety of ways. Until linguists make clearer distinctions between sequences and levels of grammar functions, teachers and researchers alike should continue to evaluate the varying results of utilizing either one procedure or a combination of procedures in teaching those areas where the two languages are seemingly at odds.

The two theories outlined above are not, or at least need not be mutually exclusive in their application to teaching. Many teachers incorporate features of both. Scores of successful teachers follow their intuitions, and often with good results. But we will never settle for letting our intuitions decide the crucial *modus operandi*. Language psychologists will have to give us more information about the nature (structure) of linguistic knowledge. And we can perhaps also come to understand the process of first-language acquisition. We can then evaluate these findings in the light of results obtained from well-constructed, controlled experiments testing the relative merits of all the approaches to language teaching.

Even the most cursory examination of the ever-growing body of language teaching materials reveals that there is a heavy reliance on pattern drills as a primary means of teaching phonology, morphology, and syntax. The label "pattern drill" has been variously applied to several kinds of practice drills, not always containing patterns. Most of us, however, apply the term to those drills which in their execution focus the learner's attention on one change at a time when this change occurs consistently within the same phonological or grammatical frame. Through this process, supposedly, the student relies on analogy function and fixes (learns) the members of all the sets and systems of the second language.

The majority of teachers can at least recognize a pattern drill when they encounter one, but many would have trouble adequately classifying the several formats they can take or, especially, describing the specific function each is meant to perform. Since any classification based on definition is arbitrary, it is understandable that researchers and textbook writers disagree as to the number and identity of these drills. Though often as many as a dozen or more specific types are posited, it seems to me that as few as four general categories suffice to describe all those currently in use. These would be: (1) the *repetition drill*; (2) the *substitution drill*; (3) the *transformation* or *construction drill*, and (4) the *translation drill*.

When one scans a representative sample of recent audiolingual texts for beginning language he is immediately aware that there exists no consensus on the part of the users or sellers of pattern drills regarding their exact functions. Indeed, most of us can readily point to published drills—and widely used ones at that—which we have identified as either mislabeled or poorly constructed. Although we possess no definitive proof as to precisely which tasks each of these types accomplishes best, certain patterns have emerged.

The *repetition drill* has been considered very effective in drilling phonology, especially when negative transfer is predictable. It is also widely

used in the initial stages to work over vocabulary, but should not be confused with the more numerous repetition drills which are not pattern drills. I am referring to that practice in which the student repeats either whole sentences or segments of sentences from the dialog. These are not pattern drills, since no patterns are established. In general, the repetition drill seems to have serious limitations as a device for teaching grammar. Even if the student's focus is intended to be unconscious, more alternation between different, though relevant patterns surely accomplishes more.

The *item substitution drill* calls for the replacement of a form in one slot by a given cued item in the same slot, thereby establishing the pattern. Very often the one substitution calls for the student to follow through with several changes, in addition to the replacement. This is usually the product of an arbitrary system of matching and agreement. In Spanish, for example, concordance between noun and modifier(s) or subject and verb are principal examples: (*S*: la casa es grande/edificios: *R*: l*os* edificios *son* grande*s*). And the verb system for this language offers several knotty problems of format when it comes to deciding on adequate cues for eliciting changes in person-number, tense, mode, aspect, etc. The morphological inventory itself, though full of irregularities, can be learned through sufficient drill because it represents a closed system. And pattern drills that point out these overt variant forms appear to make the student's correct selection much more automatic than practice which is rule conscious. Learning to manipulate verb suffixes with their corresponding stems in this fashion seems to have a substantial positive carry-over into situations requiring that the student actually communicate with sentences that he must generate without using someone else's cues as his stimuli. This is the only—but sufficient—proof that the student has gone beyond the pattern drill. The central question is, of course, the extent to which the learner has, in the classroom, in the laboratory or at home, *also* consciously recorded the components of the system, either independently of or in combination with the pattern practice.

The *transformation* (or *construction*) *drill* is easily the least understood of the four types. Transformation drills focus on a change in syntax, very often one involving permutation which results in some similar version of the original, even a kind of translation. Most, if not all, of the current crop of textbooks utilize this drill, but too many are inconsistent in its application. Teaching methods and materials based directly on a transformational grammar theory have won increasing favor among language teachers. Nevertheless, there exist no results of large-scale studies to prove the superiority of language teaching based on this theory of grammar. This should not disconcert us unduly, for it is obvious that the applied linguist, the textbook writer, and the teacher who follows them jumped the gun. Any method predicated on a transformational approach was inevitably doomed to at least partial, indeed substantial failure, since the actual conversion of the linguist's grammar into a corresponding pedagogical grammar was and remains obscure.[3]

Few have seriously suggested, however, that one goes about internalizing the structure of the target language following the same steps and procedures found in a generative grammar of that language. It is furthermore unlikely that the child learns his native tongue in this fashion, but even if such were the case, it is highly probable that once he has gone through the process of building that first language on his unformed, but latent, language foundations, he cannot duplicate the process for a second language. That is. he can never divorce any second efforts from the first ones and *must* rely on and suffer interference from those initial linguistic experiences.

On the other hand, it is not unreasonable to assume that performing transformations on basic sentences in the target language produces some positive results. Such procedures can hardly avoid revealing pertinent interrelationships between constructs. It is more than likely that they reinforce and help create an intuition or awareness of the nature of the new language classes to be stored, either as a conscious or an unconscious operation. Especially when a transformation produces a near equivalent of the

[3] See Sol Saporta, "Applied Linguistics and Generative Grammar," in *Trends in Language Teaching*, Albert Valdman, ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, pp. 81 ff. for other aspects of this question.

original kernel, i.e., a "translation" of a basic sentence it would seem that a clarification should result. Whether or not this has anything to do with the creative aspect of language is another matter. Most followers of Chomsky would probably vote "no." Evidence of the speaker's ability to generate from zero, with no overt cue acting as the stimulus, can be tested only when drills and the classroom are not involved. And at present we have no means of ascertaining the connection, if any, between this ability and the transformational process.

Since the entire notion of the application of transformations to language teaching is relatively unexplored, teachers should be cautioned not to expect miraculous or even convincing results through their use. In fact, though the learner may become more incisive if transformations work at all, false analogies can easily be the by-product of the syntactic changes called for in some texts. Until we have more information on transformational grammar and, more specifically, its application, if much at all, to language teaching, we are perhaps on safer ground if we limit ourselves to allied constructions.

Although *translation drills* have been with us the longest, their fate is as unsettled as that of the others. Never neglected as a testing form, they have often been overworked in drill form when few or no correspondences either exist or are suggested. One potential application of the translation pattern drill is to teach the target language near equivalent of the interfering native language information, when the two languages do not reflect the same reality. (English *to like*, Spanish *gustar*). Many textbooks revert to translation when good drills kept in the target language are hard to come by, but this is no solution. Paraphrasing (again, translations *in* the second language) to clarify the ambiguity, is probably more productive.

A basic consideration regarding the assumed advantages of inductive learning via the pattern drill is the question of whether to present grammatical discussions before or after the related practice. Regardless of the method, presumably there will be some kind of practice, so the only other alternative would be the extremist's ban on all discussion of grammar in the class, thereby charging the student to study the rules per se on his own and outside the class. When all is said and done, it might well turn out to be the case that in general the relative order of drill and discussion is irrelevant, that only when one actually interferes with the other need there be a fixed order. If a conscious generalization has its value and aids in internalizing the ability to use rules, then it would not be surprising that a neat synthesis for a troublesome area might help, when the two languages organize reality somewhat differently. But years of frustration have taught us at least that these correct and deliberate presentations, without accompanying drill, are all too insufficient if audio-lingual skills are our goals. Some teachers, realizing their ambivalence, endeavor to cover all possibilities by following the sequence: drill plus discussion plus more drill. The decision to keep everything, including grammatical analyses, in the target language seems to be of minor importance, and success largely depends on the individual competence of the teacher and the level of instruction. Certainly there are convincing arguments for either persuasion.

The pattern drill has proved quite vulnerable to various shortcomings. Not the least of these is the paradoxical situation which finds the pattern drill as perhaps the most effective device for teaching (especially morphology), but given unspirited, unremitting repetitions, it can easily lead to classroom monotony and thus negate much of its potential function. This is particularly true in the lower grades, where the intellectual challenge is harder to maintain than when teaching adults. Most students are aware of the limitation of the early stages of language instruction and realize that there is no alternative but to go through the deliberate building process. The experienced teacher, however, will be able to anticipate and avoid harmful lulls by following two precautions: a good pace and sufficient variety.

If I were asked to single out the major deficiency in almost all the classes in beginning Spanish that I have visited, it would be poor pace. Maintaining a sufficiently quick rhythm involves establishing the necessary ground rules during the first class meetings. We must convince the student that the entire class will benefit only if he comes forth with the correct

response in the drill with no or only momentary hesitation. This is the only way to obtain fifty minutes of learning from a fifty-minute class period. If this degree of efficiency is to be achieved, the pattern drills must meet certain requirements.

The semantic and verbal content of each drill item must be familiar to the student, though of course the specific message may be novel. Also, the drill sentence cannot be of such length that it violates the student's memory span. And when it becomes apparent that the student is merely groping his way through meaningless, although phonologically accurate words, the teacher must stop to clarify. A very effective remedy is to reword the original drill sentence. This is not always easy to effect, but as the teacher gains experience and becomes more familiar with the materials the procedure will come easier.

The most serious limitation of the pattern drill is, of course, the fact that it does not represent speech. The sentences utilized in pattern drills are correct grammatical units, but they do not regularly qualify as true communication. Since they have no natural context of their own, they are but imitations of actual sentences which one might find in conversations. In other words, the student is forced to utter for the most part untrue statements, and as such they cannot be accepted as real sentences. On the other hand, pattern drills alone should not be cited for this deficiency, for the classroom as a language teaching situation has always been an artificial one. It is called upon daily to take on the make-up of actual scenes from daily life and this simply is not possible. Therefore, verbal form and meaningful context are rarely fused. To compensate, many teachers revert to personalized drills, though it is not clear that this fully qualifies the sentences as speech. It *is* clear that this cannot be the whole answer, any more than is working over the dialogs in the form of questions and answers.[4] Or using pictures as symbolic, non-linguistic cues as the stimuli, which simulate if not exactly duplicate starting from a zero stimulus.

What, then, is the answer? If a language learning methodology based on imitation precludes the learner's acquiring the ability to produce and respond to novel sentences, then this indispensable ability must be acquired through other means. Permitting the student to try his wings without controlled guidance in the early stages will only lead to many unproductive errors. But perhaps we have not been going about it entirely wrong, perhaps our pattern drills have accomplished as much as can be expected. Indeed, it may well be the case that all we can expect of these drills is to teach the phonological component and certain of those grammatical features which comprise the more easily manipulated closed systems of the language. After this has been accomplished, even after considerable practice, the student's subsequent application would include the creative aspect of language production. Any attempt to reverse the order of these two operations would not appear too promising or even feasible. It is not to be understood, however, that there would be no overlap, that uttering real sentences would begin only the minute work with the intensive pattern drills ceases. Many audio-lingual teachers currently experience a shocking hiatus between that first year of practice and the follow-up courses that often are vaguely understood to bridge the gap and lead the student in directions which hopefully integrate the principal language skills and bring a fuller use of the target language. Certainly a precaution we should all take until such time as we have the necessary answers is to insure the maximum naturalness of all drills. Elaborating and clarifying the verbal content to match its intended context is the obvious, but not always easy remedy.

To say that we have little or no proof of the superiority of one method over another or of any combination of approaches is to admit the whole and significant truth. There are several factors which account for the seemingly more or less equivalent results obtained by all teaching methodologies. To date we have found no way to eliminate the inevitable variables which destroy, at least to some extent, the validity of our comparative studies. Also, whenever there is a shift in method, there occurs an accom-

[4] It is this author's firm conviction, however, that drills of the question-answer variety when constructed to elicit predetermined responses—and not containing too much cue—are one of the teacher's most functional tools.

panying shift in goals, thereby invalidating judgments arrived at by using the same or similar test measures. This important point has too often been overlooked. It is naive to assume that we can completely separate one language skill from the other, either in testing or in teaching.

It is furthermore unlikely that any current or near-future investigations comparing the relative merits of our methods of language teaching will shed significant light on the central arguments. This forecast should not, however, discourage such investigations, for indeed our only course is to gather more empirical evidence from studies carried out under conditions of sufficient control. In the meantime, we should continue to establish whatever meaningful linguistic hierarchies we can to be used as guidelines in setting up drills. We must, however, refuse to settle for matters as they now stand. We should even question, to a healthy extent, our apparent past and current personal successes as language teachers. To continue to question and learn from experience, to admit openly that we do not hold all or even the key answers—this is our best position. As unattractive as this semi-solution may appear to some of us, any other will likely lead us to commitments that will bind us and those who follow our example to inferior ways.

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